

FEDERAL WOMAN'S AWARD

February 1965

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON WOMEN IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

One-fourth of the employees of the Federal Government are women. Women hold nearly one-third of all Federal white-collar jobs.

Chronologically, the employment of women antedates the United States Government itself. Miss Mary K. Goddard, appointed postmaster at Baltimore, Md., in 1773, had been in office 14 years when the Constitution was signed. There are other isolated cases on record of women employed in the postal service in the early years of the Nation, but Government service was almost exclusively a man's world until the middle of the 19th century.

Early experiments in the employment of women in Government offices, a century ago, were marked by heated controversy over the propriety of such employment and over the "natural inferiority" of women. The chief incentive for employing them was economy: they were paid much less than men doing the same work. Objections to their employment ranged all the way from patronizing protectiveness to extreme moral indignation, summed up by one Government official who wrote in alarm: "I do not think that the service of females could be made efficient, or brought within the range of propriety!"

Three "females" were employed as copyists by the Patent Office in 1854; the following year, when they were about to be dismissed, a Congressman wrote to the Secretary of the Interior on behalf of one of them. The Secretary replied:

"There is every disposition on my part to do anything for the lady in question except to retain her, or any of the other females at work in the rooms of the Patent Office. I have no objection to the employment of females in the performance of such duties as they are competent to discharge, but there is such obvious impropriety in the mixing of the sexes within the walls of a public office that I have determined to arrest the practice."

It happens that the "lady in question" was Clara Barton, who shortly thereafter went to work on the Civil War battlefields and, as founder of the American Red Cross, became one of the most illustrious women in American history.

The Treasury Department made the first major breakthrough between 1862 and 1868 by hiring a number of "lady clerks," the first of whom was Miss Jennie Douglas. The Treasurer of the United States declared that her first day on the job "settled the matter in her behalf and in woman's favor." Prejudice was broken down little by little, not by any theoretical considerations of abstract justice but by the performance of the women themselves on the job. In 1868 one converted Treasury supervisor voiced the conviction of many, that "female clerks are more attentive, diligent, and efficient than males, and make better clerks."

The Civil Service Act of 1883 marked the real turning point in Government careers for women. Under the merit system, established by that Act, women were permitted and even encouraged to compete in civil service examinations, on the same basis as men. The first woman appointed to a civil service position was the late Mrs. Brice Moses. As Mary Francis Hoyt from Connecticut, a bright and adventurous girl freshly graduated from Vassar, she made the highest score on the first civil service examination given in Washington in 1883, and received the second appointment. On the occasion of her 100th birthday, June 17, 1958, Mrs. Moses was honored with a personal letter of congratulations from the President.

Equal pay for women lagged far behind equal opportunity to compete for appointment. In 1864 a maximum salary of \$600 a year for female clerks in Government was established by law; male clerks were receiving \$1200 to \$1800. Six years later, in 1870, a new law gave department heads permission to pay equal salaries to women for equal work, but very few of them chose to do so. Equality of the sexes with respect to pay finally became a reality when the Classification Act of 1923 established the present pay system, whereby the salary rate for each job is determined solely on the basis of the duties and responsibilities that make up the job. The Federal Government was the first among major employers to put into effect the principle of equal pay for equal work.

The number of women employed by the Government increased sharply during World War I, but postwar retrenchment showed that woman's permanent gains were largely in the clerical occupations. World War II, however, opened the doors to virtually all professional fields as well -- and women have kept the doors open by their own efforts and achievements. There are now over 600,000 women employed by the Federal Government.

They are found in four-fifths of all the occupations in the Federal Government, from accounting to zoology, and from archeology to space exploration.

Women predominate today in several occupations, and in some bureaus of Federal agencies. They outnumber men in five occupational classifications: personnel administration, mathematics and statistics, library and archives, accounting and budget, and general administrative and clerical. There are more women than men working as nurses, dietitians, librarians, social workers, stenographers, typists, and telephone operators. In the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, and in the Human Nutrition Research and the Household Economics Research Divisions of the Department of Agriculture, many women workers are concentrated. On the other hand, there are still many occupations in which only a few women are employed.

The last legal barrier to full equality of opportunity for women in the Federal service was removed in June 1962. Federal departments and agencies are now required to make appointments and promotions on merit only, without regard to sex.

The 1870 law, giving agency heads authority to appoint women to the higher clerkships at the same salaries as men "in their discretion," was interpreted for many years as legal authority for them to request only women, or only men, in filling positions. For a great many positions, particularly those in the higher grades, the agencies asked for men only.

A 1962 ruling by the Attorney General, who reviewed the law at the request of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, declared the former interpretation unjustified and invalid. Consequently agencies may no longer specify sex in filling any but a very few specific positions. With the removal of this barrier, true equality of men and women with respect to opportunity for appointment and advancement in the Federal service has finally been achieved.

New opportunities for women have been developing rapidly within recent months. Between January and October 1964, President Johnson announced 68 new appointments of women to high Government posts, and Federal departments and agencies appointed 311 and promoted 1,231 other women at salary levels of \$10,000 and above.

The Federal Woman's Award was established in 1960. The recipients of the first Award, in 1961, were: Beatrice Aitchison, transportation economist, Post Office Department; Ruth Elizabeth Bacon, Foreign Service Officer, Department of State; Nina Kinsella, Warden, Federal Reformatory for Women, Department of Justice; Charlotte Moore Sitterly, astrophysicist, National Bureau of Standards, Department of Commerce; Aryness Joy Wickens, economist and statistician, Department of Labor; and Rosalyn S. Yalow, radiological physicist, Veterans Administration.

The recipients of the 1962 Award were: Katherine W. Bracken, Foreign Service Officer, Department of State; Margaret H. Brass, anti-trust lawyer, Department of Justice; Thelma B. Dunn, cancer research pathologist, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Evelyn Harrison, deputy bureau director, U. S. Civil Service Commission; Allene R. Jeanes, research chemist, Department of Agriculture; and Nancy Grace Roman, astronomer and administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

In 1963 the winners were: Eleanor L. Makel, medical officer, St. Elizabeths Hospital, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Bessie Margolin, attorney, Department of Labor; Katharine Mather, geologist, Corps of Engineers, Department of the Army; Verna C. Mohagen, personnel director, Department of Agriculture; Blanche W. Noyes, aviator, Federal Aviation Agency; and Eleanor C. Pressly, engineer and administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The 1964 winners were: Evelyn Anderson, endocrinologist, National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Gertrude Blanch, aerospace scientist, Department of the Air Force; Selene Gifford, social service administrator, Department of the Interior; Elizabeth F. Messer, training specialist, Civil Service Commission; Margaret W. Schwartz, economist, Department of the Treasury; and Patricia G. van Delden, Foreign Service Officer, United States Information Agency.